How Walter Lawrence views Gujjars, Bakarwals

By: Dr. Javaid Rahi

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An Indian Civil Service officer in British India Sir Walter R. Lawrence (1879–1895) in his book "The Valley of Kashmir" explores Jammu and Kashmir's socioeconomic and cultural variety. It was published in 1895 by Henry Frowde of the Oxford University Press Warehouse in Amen Corner, E.G. It has 478 pages. The book sheds light on Jammu and Kashmir's social life, religions, races and tribes, agriculture and cultivation, livestock, industries and occupations, trade, flora and fauna, archaeology, political history, physical history, old administration, new settlement, languages, and other statistics.

Walter R. Lawrence was closely linked to India. He retired from the Indian Civil Service in 1929 after joining in 1883. He was Kashmir's first Settlement Commissioner from 1889 to 1894. He toured every corner of J&K for five years, gaining a deep grasp of the state and its people. The book also represents his views on socio-economic and cultural issues of various groups, especially of Kashmiri, Dogra, and Gujjar communities. His observations include:

Gujjars aren't Kashmiris

He mentioned the word Gujjars about 30 times in the book "The Valley of Kashmir". He noticed that Gujjars are not Kashmiris. In the 'Races and Tribe' chapter of the book on Pages 316-17, he noted that the Gujjars, who live in the mountains on the valley's edge, do not consider themselves Kashmiris. They live a semi-nomadic life , feed buffaloes and goats in the Himalayas and Siwaliks. Their language is different from Kashmiri, and they (Gujjars) rarely intermix with Kashmiris, even though they are also Muslims like Kashmiris.

Gujjars—Honest to state

Lawrence's appreciation of the Gujjars' simplicity and honesty with the state is outstanding. Compare this to Kashmiri Muslim behaviour, implying Gujjars were "infinitely more honest."

He observed in 'Races and Tribes' chapter -on page 317 of the book that "They (Gujjars) are an ignorant, inoffensive, and simple people, and in their relations with the State are infinitely more honest than the Kashmiris," Lawrence called the Gujjars a "fine, tall race of men, with large faces and prominent teeth." His depiction shows how this tribe differs from others in the vicinity.

Animals are Gujjars' greatest priority.

Lawrence presents a distinct and engaging Gujjar perspective. He analyses several aspects of the Gujjars' lifestyle, including how close they were to their buffaloes. He said on pages 359-361 of the 'Live Stock' chapter of the book, "It is touching to notice how absolutely bound up in his buffalo the Gujar is." He reveals that 'no one else occupies his thoughts or concerns'.

According to him, the Buffaloes give birth at five years and milk for eighteen months. Buffaloes give milk till 15 years old."

He stated that Gujjars built flat-topped huts for themselves and their buffaloes. He said that the Gujjars grow maize for buffalo feed. These practices show the Gujjars' commitment to animal welfare. It reflects their animal-first mindset.

He said the Gujjars' way of life revolves around animal welfare, and their steadfast commitment to this cause shows their character. Lawrence says Gujjars represent the ongoing relationship between humans and animals, which transcends culture and promotes compassion, sacrifice, and caring.

Regarding a ritual he also emphasises the Gujjars' Friday practice of donating all their milk to others. This gesture shows their generosity, community, and shared responsibility.

Pirs and Gujjars

In "The Valley of Kashmir," Walter R. Lawrence writes about the Gujjar community's relationship with Pirs, their spiritual guides. Lawrence emphasises the Gujjars' complex beliefs and traditional practices, including their unwavering faith in Pir-granted amulets (Tawiz).

Lawrence found that Gujjars trust Pirs to heal any diseases. He said Gujjars value Pirs' amulets' efficacy. Their Pir gives them an amulet (Tawiz).It sometimes contains Arabic names of God, Quranic verses, Abjad numbers depicting a name, or other words written on paper pieces or material. An amulet is usually packed in a piece of cloth that can be worn around the neck, arms or sometimes taken with water to ward against evil. Lawrence wrote on page 233 of "Statistical" on smallpox inoculation: "Gujjars of the mountains, and evidently the only help is a Pir reciting the Koran. People value Pirs' amulets' efficacy. They heal all illnesses." The amulet, he says, is worn on the right arm, neck, or turban, submerged in water and the patient drinks the water and ink, or burned and breathed. He observed that the inhalation of the amulet's smoke induces nightmares, which must be reported to the Pir, who immediately acts. Therapy at the Pir fraternity holds that evil spirits create illness and that a correctly made amulet (Tawiz) with the patient's mother's name will drive out demons, Lawrence observed.

Taxing Gujjars

The Dogra period in Jammu and Kashmir had a unique grazing tax system. The area's diverse population included Gujjars with buffaloes and Bakerwals with goats, who relied on forest grazing. Grazing in forests costs Rs. 1.40 each milk buffalo and Rs. 5 per hundred sheep/goats. These tolls hit Gujjars and Bakerwals, who grazed their sheep in the forests, hardest. The Dogra dynasty also taxed animals in Kashmir. Taxing sheep and goats, two or three were taken from villages producing 500 kharwahs of grain annually. A zamindars (landowners) received half the animals' value in coins. One pony was taken each year under identical terms and returned to the zamindars for half its value. Puttoo, a loie or woollen blanket, was taxed annually. Similar scenarios yielded half its value. Milk cows were taxed half a seer of ghee

annually. Houses also paid a poultry tax, which ranged from one to 10 fowls per year depending on the number of residents.

Honey-producing areas like the Lidar and Wardwan valleys were taxed. The kardar and others seized two-thirds of the honey produced each year, maybe as a government tax.

Tribal migrations Gujjar and Bakerwal

Lawrence identified a link between Gujjars and Forests. He calls them Forest Lord. He claimed in his book that nomad Gujjars were exempt from Begar (Forced Labour) because Kashmir produced a lot of Ghi. As a policy matter, the Government of Kashmir encourages Gujars to live in the valley.

Lawrance's book said, "The Gujar cares little for his dwelling or land. After the snow melts on the high mountains, he and his family rush off with the buffaloes in their best attire as the lord of the woodlands.Panjab traders buy this butter and make ghi. When grass is lush in July, 40 seers of butter yields 33 seers of ghi. Naturally, the middleman profits from adulteration and increases his ghi.

Gujjars and Economy

Lawrance also analyzed Jammu and Kashmir's Dogra-era economy and Gujjar and Bakerwal influence. He wrote at 364 in chapter Live Stock, "Goats are scarce in the valley, but the Bakerwals and Gujjars of Hazara, Poonch, and the lower hills of Jammu bring huge flocks to the Kashmir mountains every year." Gujar goats are significant because they provide Ghi, meat, and skins for carrying Ghi".

He also elaborates on how Milk products like 'Ghi' , Meat and animal skins constitute an important component of Trade. He also writes about middleman in this trade.

Agricultural practices

In the chapter "Agriculture and Cultivation," Lawrence says rice is the most important crop and maize the second. Poonch maize is tiny and white. The western valley's higher settlements grow it. When farming spreads, there will be less land for grazing, thus maize stalks will be good feed. Currently, only the Gujar people feed their livestock with it.

He said on page 337, "Gujar Graziers grow very fine maize crops, and the large outturn is due to the Gujjars' buffaloes and cattle doing heavy manuring."

Anger against Gujjars

Like other officers of the colonial period who were known for their unbecoming behavior against Indians, Lawrence also made remarks against Gujjars in his book which reflects his mindset. He wrote in his book "I have often urged the Gujars to set themselves free and to participate in the rise in the price of Ghi, but the Kashmiri Gujar is as stupid and slow as his friend and companion the buffalo".

(The author is a Tribal Researcher working on the Socio-cultural aspects of the Gujjars - Bakerwals community of Jammu and Kashmir)

Web Link: https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/how-walter-lawrence-views-gujjars-bakerwals/

across the mountain which is all bare.

SOCIETY

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